Violation of religious freedom in the People's Republic of China

The Society for Threatened Peoples is particularly concerned at the escalation of the repression directed against the Falun Gong meditation movement. Since March 2000 over 100 members of this group have died as a result of violent treatment meted out to them in police stations and detention centres by the security forces. To date approximately 450 Falun Gong members have been sentenced to prison terms of up to 18 years and 10,000 believers have been sent to labour work camps. In compulsorily committing 600 of the movement's followers to psychiatric institutions the authorities are violating universally recognised basic human rights. This practise is an appalling reminder of the way in which psychiatric institutions were abused in the former Soviet Union. Following a day-long trial that took place in secret in November 2000, the 37-year-old US citizen Teng Chunyan was found guilty of espionage for having dared to organise a meeting between foreign journalists and Falun Gong members who had been forcibly committed to a psychiatric institution. The Falun Gong members were held against their will in a psychiatric facility for over a month in order to prevent them from taking part in demonstrations. China should be called upon to end its repression of the Falun Gong immediately and release all members of the faith community being held in custody.

In Tibet too religious persecution has intensified over the past year, against the background of the campaign on re-education and atheism. In August 2000 the authorities issued new regulations prohibiting visits to Buddhist monasteries by the children of government employees and civil servants. The number of house searches and seizures of pictures of the Tibetans' spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has also increased. 500 nuns and monks continue to be held in detention and since 1996 at least 12,000 nuns and monks have been forced to leave their monasteries and convents. We are particularly anxious about the fate of the nun Ngawang Sangdrol. She was arrested for the first time at the age of 13 and is currently serving an 18-year prison term in Drapchi prison. When she was nominated in November 2000 as a candidate for the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize, China protested vigorously. As regards the Panchen Lama, the international community is still awaiting reliable proof that the religious dignitary, who is presumed to have been abducted by the Chinese security forces, is still alive. In autumn 2000 China did in fact show British diplomats alleged photographs of the boy and it was claimed that he is alive, unharmed, and at liberty. In order to confirm this we are asking the UN Commission on Human Rights to call on China to allow a Delegation from the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child to visit the Panchen Lama and his family. China should also be asked to put an immediate end to the re-education of nuns and monks, their expulsion from convents and monasteries and the seizure of pictures of the Dalai Lama. China should be encouraged to enter into a purposeful dialogue with the Dalai Lama aimed at achieving a just solution to the issue of Tibet.

Repression is also continuing in Xinjiang. Since April 1996 over 280 death sentences on Muslim Uigurs have been imposed and carried out. Mosques and Koranic schools have been closed and believers arbitrarily arrested. "Confessions" have been extracted under torture and lengthy prison and death sentences handed down. Following protests against the arbitrary detention of Muslim Uigurs in the town of Yining, since February 1997 at least 54 Uigurs have been sentenced to death and 90 others given lengthy prison sentences for taking part in demonstrations. Anyone in Xinjiang professing a belief in Islam is automatically suspected of being a separatist and subjected to harsh and systematic persecution by the security

authorities. All attempts to practice the Muslim faith are subject to severe restrictions. China should be called upon to cease all executions of Muslim believers forthwith.

Nor has the position of Christians in China improved. On 14 September 2000 Bishop Zheng Jingmu was arrested in the province of Jiangxi. The bishop had been under house arrest for two years. Shortly beforehand, on 26 August, the suffragan bishop of the underground Catholic Church in the province of Hebei, Jiang Ming Yuan, was arrested. During 2000 over 200 members of Protestant house churches in various provinces were arrested for their beliefs. In the past year at least 1,200 Catholic and Protestant churches and Taoist and Buddhist temples in the province of Zhejiang have been destroyed on the orders of the authorities, allegedly because they had been erected without official permission. China should immediately revoke all edicts and other legal constraints on the exercise of religious freedom. All restrictions on the licensing of faith communities and the construction of religious buildings should be abolished and not replaced.